

Michigan
Department
of Human
Services

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(517) 373-7394

Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, August 26, 2008

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What's Causing Increase Reliance on Welfare?

Experts say the lack of hi-tech skills of Michigan workers is playing a role in the increasing reliance on welfare.

Posted: 5:38 PM Aug 25, 2008

Last Updated: 8:51 PM Aug 25, 2008

Reporter: Tiffany Teasley

Email Address: Tiffany.Teasley@wilx.com

The numbers don't lie, more Michigan families are tightening their belts, and in order to feed their families, they're going to state government.

"In July our Food Assistance Program case load set a record high of over 600,000 households and 1.2 million individuals receiving these benefits," said Collen Steinman of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

So, what's causing the increasing numbers in need? The Michigan League for Human Services say it's not just rising food and gas prices, but the skills-driven job market combined with the declining auto industry in Michigan is the perfect recipe for financial problems.

"In today's high tech world, they don't have the skills and education to make what they really need to make to support their families," said Sharon Parks of the Michigan League for Human Services.

But experts say the percentage increase of households receiving welfare in mid-Michigan compared to last year is even greater than the state numbers.

If you look at the first quarter of 2007 compared to the first quarter of 2008, the increase in Ingham County went up to 8.6 percent compared to only 5.9

percent statewide," Parks said.

But the Department of Human Services says they're seeing decreasing numbers in their general cash assistance program, because of tighter sanctions and they say more people are pinpointing their specific needs.

"People are looking for the specific type of program that will help get them through these tough economic times," Steinman said.



Incomes rise in Michigan, but more in poverty

8/26/2008, 12:34 p.m. ET

By JOHN FLESHER
The Associated Press

(AP) — The Census Bureau says the percentage of Michigan residents below the poverty level rose in 2007 for the third consecutive year, while the median household income fell.

According to data released Tuesday, 14 percent of people in Michigan were below the poverty level in 2007. That was up from 13.5 percent in 2006 and 13.2 percent in 2005.

The Census Bureau says Michigan was the only state with a higher poverty rate in 2007 than the previous year.

Meanwhile, median household income in the state was \$47,950, down from the inflation-adjusted median of \$48,546 in 2006.

The figures underscore the economic downturn in Michigan, where the auto industry's struggles have had a ripple effect across the state.

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New Census report shows no change in percentage of county residents living below poverty level

Posted by Ron Fonger | The Flint Journal August 26, 2008 11:37AM

GENESEE COUNTY, Michigan -- The percentage of county residents living below the poverty level last year -- 16.8 percent -- remained unchanged from one year earlier, a new Census Bureau report says.

The statistics released today showed a drop in the percentage of households earning less than \$10,000 per year here and an increase in median household income -- from \$41,778 to \$43,112.

The Census Bureau report also says that the number of people lacking health insurance nationwide dropped by more than 1 million in 2007, the first annual decline since the Bush administration took office.

Health insurance numbers for specific areas like Genesee County were not immediately available.

The nation's poverty rate held steady at 12.5 percent, not statistically different from the 12.3 percent in 2006. That meant there were 37.3 million people living in poverty in 2007.

Information from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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Calista Springer's adoptive mother enters plea in fire death

Posted by Kathy Jessup | Kalamazoo Gazette August 26, 2008 10:20AM

Two other children removed from home

CENTREVILLE -- The adoptive mother of a 16-year-old girl who died in a house fire while chained to her bed has pleaded no contest to child abuse/neglect charges.

Marsha Springer's plea in St. Joseph County Family Court is separate from potential criminal charges that could stem from the Feb. 27 fire that killed Calista Springer.

The plea, entered Friday before Family Court Judge Thomas Shumaker, resulted in the two younger children of Marsha and Anthony Springer becoming temporary wards of the court. It erased the need for a trial, which had been scheduled to start Monday, to determine whether the court should have jurisdiction over Calista's sisters.

On Friday, Shumaker ruled there was sufficient evidence to conclude that the Springers' home "is an unfit place for the children to live in" after reviewing a transcript of testimony from a Michigan State Police trooper present at the Feb. 27 fire in downtown Centreville and a photograph of Calista before she was removed from her bed.

"At the time of the fire, Calista (Springer) was in the care of the mother, who is legally blind," says the amended court petition regarding the removal of the couple's other minor children. "Calista was chained to her bed and unable to escape the fire or to be rescued by fire and police personnel."

The two surviving sisters, who were not home at the time of the fire, were removed from the Springers' custody shortly after the fire and had been placed with relatives. Officials said the two youths recently were moved to a new foster-care site. Shumaker's order Friday now gives the Family Court jurisdiction over them.

Marsha Springer's no-contest plea means she neither admitted nor denied charges that she was responsible for abuse/neglect in Calista's death.

Anthony Springer, meanwhile, "continued to deny the allegations" of child abuse or neglect, according to court records of Friday's hearing. Police have said he was not home at the time of the 8:30 a.m. fire, but questions remain over whether he was aware that Calista was restrained to the bed in her second-floor bedroom and how long the restraints had been in use.

Anthony Springer characterized Calista as a "special needs" child prone to wandering off during the night. He said the bed restraint had been used for a short period of time because an alarm that had been used to monitor the girl was broken.

Under Michigan child-welfare law, a court finding of abuse/neglect of one child in a

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- [Former Springer home in Centreville set for demolition](#)
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- [Prosecutor broadens investigation in death of Calista Springer](#)
- [Hearing for parents of teen killed in fire while chained to bed to resume in May](#)
- ['Isolated' Calista Springer slept without sheets, blankets or pillows](#)
- [Fred Upton's office told in 2004 that Calista](#)

home is sufficient to conclude that other children are at risk, according to Douglas Fisher, St. Joseph County prosecutor. Children can be removed from the family home even if only one parent is found responsible for "neglect and cruelty."

Shumaker set a Sept. 9 dispositional hearing during which St. Joseph County Department of Human Services officials are expected to recommend services or other measures the court could take that eventually could reunify the family.

Fisher said Monday the Family Court proceedings have no connection to potential criminal charges against the parents and that it would be "inappropriate" for him to speculate on potential criminal action.

Meanwhile, three former classmates have organized a community observance to mark the six-month anniversary of Calista's death. The observance will take place at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday in the St. Joseph County Courthouse parking lot, located across the street from the fire-gutted house, which is scheduled for demolition. The site will become a public parking area.

The cause of the fire officially remains "undetermined," but reports suggest it may have been connected to an overheated vacuum that Marsha Springer was using just before the fire erupted.

[Springer case was 'under control'](#)

- [Authorities told in 2004 Calista Springer was chained to bed](#)

- [Documents reveal troubled family life](#)

- [Details emerge in fatal fire](#)

- [Girl who died in Centreville fire was confined to her bed](#)

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Full recovery likely for shot girl

TRACE CHRISTENSON • THE ENQUIRER • AUGUST 26, 2008

A 4-year-old girl shot while sleeping this past weekend should make a full recovery.

Jtyra Armstrong was expected to be released from Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo as early as Monday and is expected to fully recover, according to Battle Creek police.

Hospital officials said Monday they had no information available about the child.

The little girl was shot in the right armpit about 12:46 a.m. Sunday when one of the shots fired several doors away struck her while she was sleeping.

Police said about 25 shots were fired at a home at 195 Hubbard St. at the intersection with Parkway Drive. One traveled about 250 feet and penetrated three walls at 360 Parkway Drive, the girls' residence, before hitting the child in her upstairs bedroom.

"It was a stray bullet," said Commander James Saylor, supervisor of the Investigations Division of the police department. "No one was targeting a four-year-old."

Detectives believe at least two people were shooting at the house at 195 Hubbard Street. No one was at home at that house, and no other injuries were reported.

Jerry Armstrong, the victim's father, told police he was watching television and didn't hear the shots. He said his daughter came downstairs crying and told him she was hurt.

He found she was bleeding and she was taken to Battle Creek Health System and then to Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo.

Joyce Joplin lives next door and said Monday, Armstrong came to her door and asked her to care for his other daughter while he took Jtyra to the hospital.

"Right now I am scared as all get up," Joplin said. "People are upset and they are scared."

Joplin described the girls' mother, Tiara Cannon as "scared about her children."

Cannon and Armstrong couldn't be reached Monday afternoon for comment.

Investigators said the shooting could have been part of an ongoing feud, possibly involving gang members.

A robbery was reported at another Hubbard Street house on Wednesday and shots were fired into that house on Friday, police said.

No suspects have been identified in the Sunday morning shooting, Detective Dennis Wilkins said Monday.

Anyone with information is asked to call Battle Creek Police at 966-3322 or Silent Observer at 964-3888.

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com



Tuesday, August 26, 2008

Teen sentenced in mob attack in Mount Clemens

Christina Stolarz / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- A teen who pleaded guilty to two felony charges in connection with a mob attack in Mount Clemens in May that left one victim hospitalized with severe head injuries was sentenced this morning to 19 months in a youth prison.

Deonte J. Williams, 17, of Mount Clemens was sentenced by Macomb Circuit Judge Edward Servitto Jr. under the Holmes Youthful Trainee Act, a state law that allows him to have no public criminal record if he succeeds at the youth prison for offenders ages 17 to 21.

"Son, you got a chance at life still," said Servitto, who also ordered Williams to earn his GED while in the youth home. "Don't blow it."

Williams was also sentenced to 19 months --to be held concurrently -- for assault with a dangerous weapon. Williams admitted last month to throwing a brick through a side passenger window of a passing vehicle on North River Road near the Gibraltar Trade Center on May 31.

A review date is set for March 2010 to determine whether Williams will be released from the youth home, Servitto said.

A trial date is set for Sept. 3 for two other teens accused of participating in the attack that left Andy Kauffman with severe head injuries.

Authorities say the a group of about 20-30 young men was throwing objects onto North River Road when a brick went through the passenger side of a passing car. One of the car's passengers, Andy Kauffman, got out of the vehicle to see what happened when the group attacked him, police said.

Kauffman's wife, Angela Kauffman, cried openly as she addressed the courtroom.

"May 31 plays in my head over and over again. This was just a random act of violence," she said. "I would never have thought that driving down North River Road that it would've changed my life forever. I miss the Andy I used to know."

Angela Kauffman told the court that Andy has suffered brain injuries as a result to the beating he received when he got out of the car the night of the incident. She said their three boys, ages 9, 7, and 3, are upset that their dad can't do the things he once did with them.

"Mr. Williams sentenced Andy to his confinement ... his brain injury," she said. "No one knows when that sentence will end."

Williams' defense attorney, Larry Kipke, indicated that his client was sorry for what he did that night.

"He's seriously remorseful," he said. "He knows what he did was wrong."

You can reach Christina Stolarz at (586) 468-0343 or cstolarz@detnews.com.

Find this article at:

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Tuesday, August 26, 2008

Three teens face charges in beating death of Pontiac homeless man

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- Three teenagers -- two 14 and one 15 years old -- already in custody for a rash of random street assaults are expected to face homicide charges in the beating death of a homeless man.

The victim, Wilford "Frenchie" Hamilton, 61, died early Tuesday morning in Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital from internal injuries, police said. He was found about 10 a.m. last Thursday behind the Crofoot club on Saginaw Street. He was placed on life support for various wounds he suffered to the face and head. He had undergone surgery to remove blood clots and swelling and had been on life support.

Another 65-year-old was found around 2 a.m. last Friday at 7 on Saginaw Street apparently unconscious from a beating. He also was hospitalized and had to undergo surgery, police said. He remains in critical condition.

Around 10 p.m. last Saturday a 52-year-old man on his way home from work was attacked and robbed by a group of men on Pike Street. A half hour later, a couple were attacked while parking their car in the city's downtown business area. The group of teenagers ran off but one was chased down by a city parking employee who saw them run into the Phoenix Center parking garage.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.

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Prepare now for cold days ahead

AUGUST 25, 2008

Hot as August can be, no one has figured out how to store the heat for the cold months ahead -- and the rising costs we can anticipate for keeping warm.

That puts a premium on preparing now in other ways: insulating, caulking and doing other routine heat-saving jobs around the house, which anyone with a utility bill would be wise to do. But just as important, Congress must put more backstops for poor working families in place well ahead of the first frost.

The U.S. Senate made a start earlier this month with a bill to add \$2.5 billion to the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program -- and then backed off, because President George W. Bush threatened a veto.

That amount of money would nearly double what the program has distributed annually in recent years, and it still would not cover the true needs that rack the country. For every household that gets assistance, experts estimate another five more would qualify.

This winter, even if it's fairly mild, looks to be a budget buster. Natural gas bills are expected to rise 20% or so over last winter, an increase that will fall hard on Michigan's already cash-strapped families. In other parts of the country, particularly the Northeast, that depend more on fuel oil, the higher cost of keeping the furnace going will loom at astronomical heights. Without more money, LIHEAP-funded programs will have to choose between helping fewer people and cutting back on how much it can help each family.

Families that turn to state programs funded by LIHEAP generally have jobs or are on fixed incomes due to disability or age. Many of them are onetime recipients, as they work through a medical problem or economic disruption.

This is not a welfare program, and, in fact, welfare generally provides more utility assistance. The long-term goal of trying to prevent welfare dependency means

some aid is essential for low-income families to meet their basic needs, such as for food and heat. Otherwise, workers may have no choice but to fall back on welfare simply to keep their children warm.

Congress will have more opportunities next month -- and must seize them -- to ensure that fewer people fear the turn of the seasons.

More schools fail to meet federal standards; grad numbers released

Posted by [Claire Cummings and Tarryl Jackson | Staff Report](#) August 26, 2008 08:40AM

The number of area schools that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress toward federal goals has nearly doubled from a year ago.

Among those that did not meet federal standards are schools in the Albion, Jackson, Northwest, Springport and Vandercook Lake districts, according to results released Monday by the state Department of Education.

Most area schools improved or stayed the same on their state report cards. Western was the only district that earned all A's.

"We're very pleased with the work that the students and teachers are doing in the classroom," Superintendent William Coale said. "The results are showing."

Coale said staff and administrators have been concentrating more on one-on-one instruction and intervention for students who need help.

The state also released high school graduation rates Monday, saying the new way of calculating them was the reason for many schools not meeting AYP.

In the Jackson County area, Napoleon High School had the highest graduation rate at 98 percent, while Leslie High School had the lowest at 78.3 percent — not including alternative schools. The statewide graduation rate was reported at 75.45 percent.

Most of the local schools that did not meet AYP failed to do so because one or all student subgroups — such as economically disadvantaged or special-education students — did not improve in at least one subject on state standardized tests.

"There are so many ways you can lose AYP," Vandercook Lake Superintendent Tony Hollow said. "It's a difficult moving target."

Vandercook Lake High School did not make AYP this year because special-education students did not show enough improvement in English or math.

Hollow said the district is working hard to improve. "It's not a time for excuses," he said. "That's the reality of it."

About 80 percent of Michigan public schools made Adequate Yearly Progress for the 2007-08 report, down from 83 percent in 2006-07. The state also raised the scoring requirements on standardized tests last year.

Northwest High School failed to make AYP because economically disadvantaged and special-education students did not improve enough in English language arts and math.

Cari Bushinski, curriculum director at Northwest, said the high school is working to make sure all students are at the level they need to be with the state's new curriculum standards.

"That's a real challenge," Bushinski said. "The curriculum they've encountered is very rigorous."

Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, all students are to be proficient in reading and math by 2014. Public schools must periodically test students to gauge their success, as measured by Adequate Yearly Progress.

The main way Michigan measures progress is through standardized tests such as the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and the Michigan Merit Exam.

Schools that do not make adequate progress for two consecutive years wind up on a sanctions list. Albion, da Vinci, Jackson, and Northwest are the area districts or charter school systems that have schools on this list. Sanctions get tougher every year.

Under the sanctions, da Vinci and Northwest high schools must offer children free transportation to the school of their parents' choice and they must offer students supplemental services.

Albion and Jackson high schools must continue offering choice, transportation and supplemental services along with developing a plan to restructure the school.

Jackson's Amy Firth School must continue its restructuring plan.

Graduation rates are lower for many school districts than in the past because the numbers are calculated in a different way.

The new methodology generally is considered to be a more accurate and reliable measure of graduation rates. It counts only on-time graduates who are getting regular diplomas and is designed to better track transfer students.

Michigan had reported graduation rates of about 85 percent in recent years, but that used different methodology that was not always based on a four-year completion timetable. Outside estimates typically pegged Michigan's graduation rate at 70 percent to 75 percent within the four-year window.

Michigan's new graduation rate is not directly comparable with older rates.

The new methodology also should give districts a better measure of their dropout rates.

The statewide dropout rate for the class of 2007 was calculated at 15 percent within the four-year period. Michigan's statewide dropout rate in the past typically had been reported at fewer than 4 percent.

— The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Some relief, but no added funds, for kids' health plan

DETROIT FREE PRESS

AUGUST 26, 2008

In a sign that local pressure can sometimes reverse bad federal decisions, the Bush administration has decided against penalizing states that failed to bar middle-income children from qualifying for health care under SCHIP -- the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

The about-face on this issue means states that had gone so far as to file lawsuits to resist the edict from Washington won't risk the loss of federal funds because of their refusal to comply with such clearly shortsighted restrictions. About 15 states were resisting a federal rule limiting coverage for children in families with income 250% above the national poverty level, or \$44,000 for a family of three.

Of course, the decision not to penalize states isn't the same as adding the federal funds that states had hoped to receive under SCHIP. The program currently provides coverage for more than 6 million people. Last year, Congress fought to more than double spending on SCHIP to about \$12 billion, but the proposal died under two different vetoes by President George W. Bush. He said it was a backdoor attempt to turn SCHIP into government-sponsored health care.

Congress should debate the scope of SCHIP again once the new administration -- Republican or Democrat -- is in place next year.

No matter how the Bush administration may have tried, the federal government cannot just walk away from its partnership to help states do something about the growing number of middle-class households that are struggling with health care coverage and costs. Some of the solution may lie

in allowing states to retain their latitude in deciding how to help families that don't qualify under federal income rules.

For now, the Bush administration made the right call in not piling onto the states' problems with federal penalties. But that is just a small step in the right direction of addressing a much larger health care problem.

Michigan Department of Human Services News Release

Contact: Edward Woods III (517) 373-7394

DHS, partners provide safety net for families in economic crisis
Census releases new data on poverty in Michigan

Aug. 26, 2008

Despite growing estimates of poverty and declines in income, the Michigan Department of Human Services and its community partners continue to provide a safety net for families in economic crisis.

The U.S. Census Bureau today released data on income, earnings and poverty for all states and communities from the 2007 American Community Survey. For Michigan, the data revealed:

- Michigan's poverty rate is 14 percent, up from 13.5 percent in 2006.
- Ingham County poverty rate is 18.3 percent.
- The state's median income is \$47,950, down \$596 or 1.2 percent from the 2006 median income of \$48,546.

"Families don't have to go hungry, become homeless or live without heat or electricity," said Randy Rauch, acting Ingham County DHS director. "We can help them with the many assistance programs we offer. If they don't qualify for some reason, we have a number of community partners who can provide temporary help that gets families through an economic crisis."

More than 18 percent of Michigan's population receives some form of assistance from DHS programs. While the Family Independence Program, general cash assistance, continues to decline, food, emergency energy and medical assistance programs continue to grow steadily. The Food Assistance Program, for example, has increased 136 percent since December 2000.

"DHS provides some kind of assistance for nearly one in five people," said Sheryl Thompson, acting director of DHS outstate operations. "It takes a strong personal commitment, like the individuals speaking here today, to become self sufficient."

Jamie Burgess had three children aged 1, 3 and 6, when she filed for divorce from her husband. Now, she's a registered nurse working for Ingham Regional Medical Center and her children are 11, 13 and 16 years old. She was honored in 2004 as the Capital Area Michigan Works! Agency Alumna of the Year. While attending college, DHS provided child day care, medical and emergency energy assistance to Burgess.

"I wouldn't be a nurse today if not for all the community programs that helped me out during those early years," Burgess said. "Each program provided just the support I needed at the time I needed it so I could keep going."

For more information, please consult the DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs or www.michigan.gov/poverty